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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [FR](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: FRENCH NEA A/S-EQUIVALENT ON THE
ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS, SYRIA, SEPTEMBER 17

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Polmincouns called on French MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Jean Felix-Paganon September 17 to request a readout from FM Kouchner's visit September 10-14 to the Levant before Kouchner travels to Washington. Felix-Paganon, accompanied by DAS-equivalent for the Levant Ludovic Pouille, focused on the Israeli/Palestinian peace process and Lebanon (reported septel along with discussion of Iran). He said that Kouchner will share with Secretary Rice his sentiment that something is happening between the Israelis and Palestinians and his belief that Israeli PM Olmert and Palestinian President Abu Mazen are ready to get down to work on a comprehensive accord. Within the MFA, Felix-Paganon, who accompanied Kouchner, said he is recommending that Kouchner press for a strong U.S. engagement with the parties to achieve the most ambitious accord possible. He explained that this was not just to satisfy Abu Mazen but was in Israel's best interests as well; under current circumstances, it was critical to avoid Palestinian and Arab disappointment. In Felix-Paganon's view, U.S. pressure on both sides was vital or "it won't work."

¶2. (C) Felix-Paganon said another "paper accord" would be a non-starter, and a more "substantial" accord needed to cover the release of prisoners, the clampdown on movement from Palestinian territory into Israel, and settlements. He termed the contacts between Olmert and Abu Abbas, as well as Fayyad's appointment as Palestinian PM, an unprecedented opportunity that will only succeed with concrete results. Political agreements without concrete results on the ground are no longer relevant, Felix-Paganon continued. Pouille interjected that Kouchner had already said to the Secretary that the USG must avoid hosting a meeting in November without substance or that would lead to failure of any agreement reached. Felix-Paganon described his worst case fears of the outcome for such a meeting as one in which Abu Mazen is accused of abandoning core Palestinian interests (e.g., refugees' right of return) or a collection of more empty promises. Even though it was obvious the Israeli public has little confidence in Palestinian abilities to maintain the level of security Israel needs, Felix-Paganon returned to the degree of engagement at senior Israeli/Palestinian levels that gives Kouchner reason to be optimistic.

¶3. (C) Felix-Paganon said Kouchner hopes to receive from the Secretary a clearer idea of how we hope to organize the regional meeting in November and, in particular, the role we hope other interested international players like France and Quartet could play. He added that he expected Kouchner would raise the question of a French invitation with the Secretary in Washington, possibly in any "private" (i.e. one-on-one) meeting they might have. When asked to explain why Kouchner kept referring in public to possible inclusion of Syria in such a meeting, Felix-Paganon replied that France considered Syria's participation "indispensable" for any meaningful

gathering to discuss peace in the region. France's relations with Syria, he stated, remain limited and focused on ensuring Syria's good behavior in Lebanon during this sensitive election period. There was no plan for Kouchner to visit Damascus during this timeframe, but in all likelihood Kouchner will meet Syrian FM Mu'allim "at the end of the ministerial week" in New York to take stock and repeat the message that any positive change in French/Syrian relations depends on Syria respecting Lebanon's sovereignty and national independence. (Comment: We had heard previously that Kouchner was planning to meet Mu'allim in New York at the end of a series of meetings to include us, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab League possibly to deliver a tough carrot and stick message. This sounds consistent with that scenario, and we would expect Kouchner to repeat it for the Secretary. End comment)

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